

WIT TARNAWSKI AS A TRANSLATOR OF CONRAD

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Abstract: Wit Tarnawski (1894-1988) was an eminent Conrad critic and translator. His research developed within three areas: the translation, interpretation and popularisation of Conrad's works and biography. In the present essay we shall focus on the least researched part of Tarnawski's work – his literary translations. In particular, we shall analyse his translation of *The Sisters*, which has been widely discussed in Polish literary and critical circles.

Keywords: Wit Tarnawski, *The Sisters*, Conrad, translation, Kazimierz Wyka.

Wit Tarnawski (1894-1988) was an eminent Conrad critic and translator – an authority whose work has been cited by international Conrad scholars such as Jocelyn Baines, Eloise Knapp Hay, Gustav Morf, Ian Watt, Adam Gillon and Andrzej Busza.¹ “We may suppose – claims the Polish critic Stefan Zabierowski – that his reading of Conrad's works and his meetings with people who knew Conrad personally were the causes of Tarnawski's fascination with the author of *Lord Jim* and his decision to verbalize this enthusiasm.”² His research developed within three areas: the translation, interpretation and popularisation of Conrad's works and biography.³ In the present essay we shall focus on the least researched part of Tarnawski's work – his literary translations. In particular, we shall analyse his translation of *The Sisters*, which has been widely discussed in Polish literary and critical circles.

TARNAWSKI'S LITERARY TRANSLATIONS

Tarnawski translated three works written by Conrad. As their reception and evolution is somewhat tortuous, it is worth presenting these in detail. In 1945 – when he

¹ S. Zabierowski. “Wit Tarnawski” [In:] *Idem. Dziedzictwo Conrada w literaturze polskiej*. Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992, p. 237. In Poland Zabierowski has written extensively on Tarnawski's life and works.

² *Ibid.*, p. 239 [my translation].

³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

was in Palestine – together with Janusz Jasieńczyk (the pseudonym of J. Poray-Biernacki) he translated the short story “Prince Roman” using the pseudonym Wit Turno.⁴ In 1974 he published a new, corrected version of this rendition in Britain – this time under his real name.⁵ The second work he translated – a fragment of *The Sisters* – came out in 1949 in the London “Wiadomości” magazine. Once again it was teamwork – this time with Aleksandra Poleska (the pseudonym of Krystyna Sierzowa).⁶ This translation was also re-published in a new, unabridged and corrected version in 1964 in the Polish “Twórczość” literary magazine.⁷ Tarnawski’s last and longest translation was that of *Under Western Eyes*, which he completed in 1955.⁸ His translations of *The Sisters* and *Under Western Eyes* were included in the prestigious edition of Conrad’s collected works which was published in Poland in the years 1972-1974 – a fact that would appear to testify to their literary merit⁹. Tarnawski planned one more translation of the most demanding and longest of Conrad’s novels – *Nostromo* – but (according to Zabierowski) did not get beyond the initial preparations.¹⁰

CONRAD’S *THE SISTERS*

Conrad began work on *The Sisters* at the end of 1895, this being his third novel after *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. The book was never finished because Conrad undertook a new project at the suggestion of his friend and literary advisor Edward Garnett.¹¹ The extant fragment of the manuscript consists of forty pages and is divided into seven chapters. They focus on two themes: the first four chapters depict Stephen – a young painter from the Ukraine – who wanders across western Europe; the following chapters concentrate on two orphaned Basque sisters. One of them, Rita, is raised by her uncle in the Parisian suburbs, where Stephen eventually settles. *The Sisters* was published posthumously in America in 1928 with

⁴ J. Conrad. *Książę Roman*. Transl. J. Jasieńczyk, W. Turno. *Gazeta Polska*, supplement 1, Jerusalem 1945.

⁵ *Idem*. *Książę Roman*. Transl. J. Jasieńczyk, W. Tarnawski. London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1974.

⁶ *Idem*. *Siostry*. Transl. A. Poleska, W. Tarnawski. *Wiadomości*, London, 1949, № 33-34, p. 2. Hereafter cited as PT.

⁷ *Idem*. *Siostry*. Transl. W. Tarnawski. *Twórczość* 1964, № 6, pp. 8-26. Reprinted: *Idem*. *Siostry*. Transl. W. Tarnawski (with an introduction by W. Tarnawski and an afterword by K. Wyka). Warszawa: PIW, 1967. Subsequent quotations are from this edition – hereafter cited as T.

⁸ *Idem*. *W oczach Zachodu*. Transl. W. Tarnawski. London: Biblioteka Polska Veritas, 1955.

⁹ *Idem*. *Siostry*. Transl. W. Tarnawski [In:] *Idem*. *Dziela*. Ed. Z. Najder. Warszawa: PIW, 1972, vol. XXIV; *Idem*. *W oczach Zachodu*. Transl. W. Tarnawski [In:] *Idem*. *Dziela*. Ed. Z. Najder. Warszawa: PIW, 1974, vol. XII.

¹⁰ S. Zabierowski. “Wit Tarnawski”, *ed. cit.*, p. 241.

¹¹ Conrad’s letters to E. Garnett, 23/24 III 1896, 9 IV 1896 (*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Ed. F. Karl, L. Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, vol. I, pp. 268, 272); F.M. Ford. “Tiger, Tiger” (Being a Commentary on Conrad’s *The Sisters*). *The Bookman*, January 1928, vol. LXVI, № 5, p. 497, <http://www.conradfirst.net/view/flipbook?id=224#page/p.496/mode/1up>.

a foreword by Ford Maddox Ford.¹² An excerpt from the novel was translated by Poleska and Tarnawski and published in the London “Wiadomości” weekly in 1949 together with a very short introduction by Tarnawski. Some years later, Tarnawski made a new attempt at translating the novel, this time on his own. The second version came out in the “Twórczość” literary magazine in 1964. It was subsequently published in a hardback edition in 1967 with a ‘translator’s preface’ and an extensive interpretative essay by the prominent Polish literary critic Kazimierz Wyka.

POLESKA AND TARNAWSKI (1949)

We do not know much about the assumptions underpinning the translators’ work. From the short introduction we can gather that Poleska and Tarnawski made one key interpretative assumption, namely that *The Sisters* is an autobiographical text. “In the first chapter,” Tarnawski argues, “(which seems to be the writer’s artistic autobiography) – we have a very critical and harsh depiction of the Western mentality.”¹³ Additionally, Poleska and Tarnawski draw attention to the different style that Conrad uses in this novel: “*The Sisters* gives us a new perspective on an unknown face of Conrad [...]. Here we see a different, original Conrad: [we have] a unique sample of a style which is not repeated later anywhere else and which is not similar to anything he wrote earlier.”¹⁴ Both of these interpretative assumptions were amplified and developed by Tarnawski in the complete translation of *The Sisters* in 1964.

Let us go back to the first version produced by Tarnawski with Poleska in 1949. The translation is heavily abridged. A number of passages were omitted from the Polish version without any indication. Only the omission of the whole of chapter III was noted in the text and in the translators’ footnote. Other major omissions included:

1. In the first part of chapter I one paragraph – concerning Stephen’s sojourn abroad – was deleted, starting with the sentence: “But mostly he sought refuge from the reproach of his impotence in ardent work.”¹⁵ and finishing with “... how faint his trace on the earth was fated to be.” (C, 47). This fragment is significant, as it includes a hint about Stephen’s untimely death.
2. Towards the end of chapter II an extensive fragment (two paragraphs) was omitted; it dealt with Stephen’s reaction to his parents’ death, his correspondence with his brother and his reasons for not being able to return to his homeland – from the sentence: “Stephen grieved, and carried his grief, contained and profound, through every second of the first few weeks” (C, 52) to: “There’s

¹² J. Conrad. *The Sisters*. *The Bookman*, January 1928, vol. LXVI, № 5, pp. 481-494. Reprinted: *Idem*. *The Sisters*. Introd. F.M. Ford. New York: Crosby Gaige, 1928.

¹³ W. Tarnawski. “Słowo wstępne do przekładu” [Introduction] [In:] J. Conrad. *Siostry*. Transl. A. Poleska, W. Tarnawski. *Wiadomości*, London, 1949, № 33-34, p. 2 [my translation].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵ J. Conrad. “The Sisters” [In:] *Congo Diary and Other Uncollected Pieces*. Ed. Z. Najder. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1978, p. 47. Hereafter cited as C.

no country in the world like our country. Come!” (C, 54). This fragment is important, as it contains the allegedly autobiographical motifs which were pointed out by Tarnawski and some other western scholars.

2. In the first part of chapter IV one paragraph was skipped; it emphasized Stephen's loneliness in Paris and his unsuccessful artistic life – from the sentence: “Stephen would not cross again the frontier of Bohemia” (C, 58) to: “A life ineffectual, joyless and tranquil” (C, 58).
3. In chapter VII the last paragraph, describing Rita's love for her uncle, her hostility towards her aunt and the dilapidation of their house, was removed – from the sentence: “Only from time to time during her repeated visits to Passy she caught a glimpse of sincere emotions” (C, 69) to: “...in futile rounds of mournful and useless inspection” (C, 70). This omission may have been prompted by the translators' desire to end the translation in an effective way and to build up suspense, as the paragraph which closes the translation ends with “She appeared gracious and heartless living in aimless periods of sunshine, living between sunrises and sunsets as if there had been, suspended over her head, no menace of another day” (C, 69) – „Rita miała wielką zdolność dostosowywania się do warunków, tak wielką, że wyglądało to nawet na zupełny brak serca; mogło się zdawać, że żyje pełna wdzięku, lecz bez czucia, w jałowym blasku słońca – od wschodów do zachodów – tak jakby nad jej głową nie wisiała groźba nadchodzących dni” [...] This is a powerful ending which, in the manner of a cliffhanger, foreshadows portentous events. In other words, it is a dramatic and showy ending which leaves the reader unsatisfied and regretting that Conrad did not continue the story.

The translation is rough, not fluent, and does not read easily. This is very important, because the reader is aware that he or she is not reading an original text. Without wishing to over-emphasize the value of “fluency of translation”, which is often deprecated in translation studies and results in a negative evaluation,¹⁶ I deliberately stress this aspect of the text because it is this feature that later undergoes the most significant change in the 1964 translation. The roughness of the first version may have been caused by the translators' fidelity to the syntax and lexis of the original. They chose the closest lexical equivalent within the semantic fields of a given word and did not look for near synonyms within the whole semantic area. The following examples would seem to justify this hypothesis:

Conrad	Poleska – Tarnawski (1949)
yellow corn (p. 50)	żółte zboże ¹⁷
uniformed, embroidered (p. 50)	w haftowanym mundurze
the profound darkness of her grief (p. 51)	pogrążona w ciemnej rozpacz

¹⁶ L. Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility: a History of Translation*. London–New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 1–6.

¹⁷ If the meaning of the Polish phrase is the same, the English back-translation is not provided.

the meaningless stare of naïve art (C 52)	tępyim spojrzeniem dzieł prymitywnej sztuki [dull stare]
the resignation of indifference (p. 52)	obojętnością rezygnacji
sacrifices (p. 58)	poświęceń
the grass sprang up, vigorous (p. 59)	tryskała w górę trawa żywotna
the Everlasting Treasure (p. 62)	Wieczne Bogactwo [everlasting wealth]
finger (p. 63)	pazur [claw]
pine (p. 63)	sosna
just such another girl (p. 64)	jako podobną dziewczynkę [such a similar girl]
spot (p. 65)	plama
unseeing (eyes) (p. 66)	niewidzącymi (oczami)
middle life (p. 68)	przeciętnego życia

On the whole, the translators tried to give the closest lexical equivalent, without taking into account other typical Polish collocations for a given lexeme, e.g. *yellow corn* – *żółte zboże*, *embroidered (uniform)* – *haftowany mundur*, the *darkness* of her grief – *ciemna rozpacz*. Some modifications of Tarnawski's choices in the second version will be shown later in the present essay.

Poleska and Tarnawski retain foreign phrases, putting them in inverted commas ("fueros", "Rey neto", "Quién sabe?", "Bueno"), but they do not supply any footnotes giving translations of the Spanish expressions. 'Potential carriers of foreignness'¹⁸ connected with the Russian and Polish languages were eliminated for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the only Russian lexeme "Traktirs" (C, 52) was Polonised (this being an example of the domestication method)¹⁹ as "zajazd" [inn] (PT, 2). Secondly, the elements of Polish language and culture which are present in the original and function there as "indicators of foreignness"²⁰ were obviously neutralised in the Polish version. These were proverbs, sayings and the lexeme "Kossak". In the original we find such proverbs of Polish origin as:²¹

Conrad	Poleska – Tarnawski (1949)
anything may be done – only cautiously (p. 51)	wszystko można, byle z wolna i z ostrożna ²¹

¹⁸ The term was coined by R. Lewicki: R. Lewicki. *Obcość w odbiorze przekładu*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2000.

¹⁹ Domestication is defined by Venuti as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values"; it involves "inscribing translation with dominant target-culture ideology." Later he describes such an approach as "assimilation". (L. Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility*. London–New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 20, 203).

²⁰ R. Lewicki. *Obcość w odbiorze przekładu...*, ed. cit., p. 17.

²¹ This proverb is also used in Russian. Cf. G. Morf. "Polish Proverbial Sayings in Conrad's Work" [In:] *Joseph Conrad Colloquy in Poland*. Ed. R. Jabłowska. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków: Ossolineum, p. 90.

priest's eyes – that see everything – and a wolf's maw – that would swallow everything (p. 53)	_____ (omission)
I kiss your hands and feet. (p. 68)	Całuję ręce pani i stopy.

These sayings in the original played the role of “signals of foreignness”, since they were unknown to the primary recipient. In the Polish version, however, they were recognized as familiar stock expressions by the target readers.

THE SECOND TRANSLATION OF *THE SISTERS* BY TARNAWSKI (1964)

The second translation is preceded by an extensive translator's foreword in which Tarnawski enlarges on the assumptions on which his new translation was based. Firstly, he interpreted *The Sisters* as being an undoubtedly autobiographical work. Tarnawski contends that the text “gives an idea of the very personal nature of the book. The picture of little Stephen taking in [...] the sight of his native land has the freshness and intimacy of the author's memories of his own past. In this unfinished work, the personal element lies everywhere on the surface; we cannot miss it.”²² Other autobiographical elements that Tarnawski mentions are as follows:

The chief character, an artist called Stephen, was born, like Conrad, in the Ukraine, and the story of his artistic endeavours and disappointments might be an account of Conrad's own agonies during the early years of his literary career. [...] The second theme of *The Sisters*, the story of Rita [...] also touched Conrad very closely. It is an echo of his romance in Marseilles with Rita Lastaola. [...] Last, but not least, in *The Sisters* we again catch undertones of Conrad's own drama concerning his family and nation [...]. The artist, Stephen, leaves his own country in pursuit of an illusory ideal of art; his parents [...] do not live to see his return. [...] The passage in the novel in which Stephen learns of their death [...] again tells us what we already know so well in Conrad.

Such an interpretation led to further conclusions, namely that the author's strong emotional engagement in the description of his experiences left its mark on the linguistic form of the novel. “The personal – at times autobiographical – nature of *The Sisters* is evident [...] at the level of language. Nowhere else is Conrad's English so Polish in character.”²³

It is difficult to decide definitively whether this style was typically and uniquely Polish, but the translator's intuition is worthy of note. “Another Conrad” can be detected in this novel. The difference had been spotted by English scholars earlier, but they came to diametrically opposite conclusions. Edward Garnett was the first to remark on the singularity of the text, its stylistic awkwardness and its artificial presenta-

²² W. Tarnawski. “The Sisters” [In:] *Idem. Conrad the Man, the Writer, the Pole*. London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1972, pp. 149-150.

²³ *Idem*. “The Sisters”..., *ed. cit.*, p. 151.

tion of themes. He therefore advised Conrad to abandon the novel and move in “the marine direction”.²⁴

Another person who detected a “different Conrad” in this work was Ford Maddox Ford, who – unlike Garnett – revelled in the text’s peculiarity:

But, supposing that, at that parting of the ways in 1897, Conrad had chosen to write in French of the misty problems of the Slav soul [...]. The vista that opens to me of the works of an immensely great international writer, another but more impassioned Turgeniev, another Flaubert, but more of a poet, has a gloomy glory that I cannot but regret.

Well, we should have had another Conrad [...] what a mysterious and gigantic figure that would have been, going away into the mists of the mind.²⁵

Ford is full of appreciation for the unfinished novel and, pointing to Conrad’s masters Ivan Turgenev²⁶ and Gustave Flaubert,²⁷ forms a hypothesis about Conrad crossing contemporary literary paradigms.

Nowadays Conrad scholars confirm Tarnawski’s intuitions and draw attention to the Polish aspects of Conrad’s syntax (not only in connection with *The Sisters*).²⁸ However, it would seem that in the case of *The Sisters* the process of linguistic interference (and especially negative language transfer) is particularly evident because of the novel’s autobiographical character. That is why Tarnawski, in revising his 1949 translation – which “constituted a precious basis for the final version” – tried to find set Polish expressions and stock collocations. However, he did not look for them in contemporary Polish usage, but in the works of the Polish Romantics: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński. The “echoes of Romanticism” which Tarnawski thought he had found in the original called for “Romantic clichés” which were available in the Polish language. In another passage, Tarnawski outlines traces of Romantic patterns in the novel and further argues that:

Grandiloquence and a tendency to pathos are, as we know, characteristic features of Conrad’s early style; nowhere else is he so reminiscent of the worst Romantic manner. The first fragment of the book is full of high-flown phrases about beauty, truth, exalted vocations and the tragic

²⁴ Garnett’s opinion is quoted by Ford [In:] M. Ford. “Tiger, Tiger”, *ed. cit.*, p. 497; J. Baines. *Joseph Conrad. A Critical Biography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 207.

²⁵ M. Ford. “Introduction” [In:] J. Conrad. *The Sisters*. New York: Crosby Gaige, 1928, p. 19.

²⁶ The relationship between Turgenev and Conrad has been discussed by K. Sokołowska: K. Sokołowska. *Conrad and Turgenev: Towards the Real*. East European Monographs, New York–Boulder–Lublin: Columbia University Press, 2011 – and also by B. Pudelko: B. Pudelko. *Ivan Turgenev and Joseph Conrad: a study in philosophical, literary and socio-political relationships*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2012.

²⁷ The influence of Flaubert on Conrad’s mode of writing has been analysed by Y. Hervouet: Y. Hervouet. *The French Face of Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

²⁸ I.M. Pulc. “The Imprint of Polish on Conrad’s Prose” [In:] J. Conrad. *Theory and World Fiction*. Ed. W.M. Aycock *et al.* Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 1974, pp. 117–139; M. Morzinski. *Linguistic Influence of Polish on Joseph Conrad’s Style*. New York–Boulder–Lublin: Columbia University Press, UMCS Press, 1994; M. Lucas. *Aspects of Conrad’s Literary Language*. New York–Boulder–Lublin: Columbia University Press, 2000.

destiny of the artist. [...] If we did not know that these words had been written by Conrad we might easily ascribe them to one of the nineteenth-century Romantics.²⁹

The assumption that Conrad first had the Polish text in his mind and only then autotranslated it into English is fundamental for Tarnawski's translatorial work. "While working on the translation of this unfinished novel," Tarnawski confesses, "I sometimes felt that I was restoring to its original language something that had been translated into English."³⁰ Working on this assumption, he would search for Polish Romantic equivalents for English phrases. This is a very atypical situation in which the translator seeks to uncover the *Urtext*, but this is not the original as we know it (the English version), but its copy – the translated text. Such a case has been described, albeit theoretically, in studies on translation by Gilles Deleuze³¹ and Jacques Derrida.³² In practice, Tarnawski's case would be one in which a Polish translation "precedes" the original, the translator becoming the creator or reconstructor of the original.

This is best illustrated by the juxtaposition of several examples in order to show how the translation evolved. In the final version of 1964 we can observe how Tarnawski selected standard collocations to make the text fluent and adapt it to the style and conventions of Polish Romanticism.

Conrad	Poleska – Tarnawski (1949)	Tarnawski (1964)
yellow corn (p. 50)	żółte zboże	plowe [fawn] zboże (p. 19)
uniformed, embroidered (p. 50)	w haftowanym mundurze	w naszywkach [stripes] (p. 20)
the secrets of the trade (p. 51)	sekretów	sekretów rzemiosła [secrets of craft] (p. 21)
the profound darkness of her grief (p. 51)	pogrążona w ciemnej rozpacz	pogrążona w czarnej rozpacz [black despair] (p. 21)
the meaningless stare of naïve art (p. 52)	tępy spojrzeniem dzieł prymitywnej sztuki	pustym spojrzeniem naiwnych bohomazów [vacant stare of naive daub] (p. 22)
the resignation of indifference (p. 52)	obojętnością rezygnacji	z obojętną rezygnacją [with indifferent resignation] (p. 23)

²⁹ Tarnawski means the Polish Romantics. In the Polish version of the essay he names one of them: Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) – a "master of grandiloquent prose" (W. Tarnawski. "Wstęp" [Introduction] [In:] J. Conrad. *Siostry*. Warszawa: PIW, 1967, p. 139).

³⁰ Tarnawski, "The Sisters", *ed. cit.*, p. 151.

³¹ G. Deleuze. *Różnica i powtórzenie*. Transl. B. Banasiak, K. Matuszewski. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 1997, p. 379.

³² J. Derrida. "Difference" [In:] *Idem. Margins of Philosophy*. Transl. A. Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982; and *Idem*. "Des Tours de Babel" [In:] *Theories of Translation*. Ed. R. Schulte, J. Biguenet. Transl. J.F. Graham. London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 218-227.

sacrifices (p. 58)	poświęceń	ofiar [offerings] (p. 33)
the grass sprang up, vigorous (p. 59)	tryskała w górę trawa, żywotna	plenila się trawa, silna [grass ran wild, strong] (p. 34)
the Everlasting Treasure (p. 62)	Wieczne Bogactwo	wieczysty skarb [timeless treasure] (p. 39)
finger (p. 63)	pazur	łapa [paw] (p. 42)
pine (p. 63)	sosna	pinia [stone pine] (p. 42)
just such another girl (p. 64)	jako podobną dziewczynkę	jako taką samą, niewielką dziewczynkę [such a similar tiny girl] (p. 43)
spot (p. 65)	plama	punkt [point] (p. 48)
unseeing (p. 66)	niewidzącymi (oczami)	krótkowzrocznymi [myopic] (p. 49)
middle life (p. 68)	przeciętnego życia	statecznego życia [solid life] (p. 51 – The English back translation is not provided)

Let us now look more closely at how the translation changed with respect to the selection of collocations. In my opinion, this is a key factor for the introduction of so-called “transparent discourse”,³³ making the translation “fluent”:³⁴ *yellow corn* – *żółte zboże* – *plowe* [fawn] *zboże*, *embroidered* (uniform) – *haftowany* *mundur* – *w naszywkach* [stripes], *darkness of her grief* – *ciemna rozpacz* – *czarna* [black] *rozpacz*. Let us note how Tarnawski smoothes out the text by the introduction of stock phrases. He looks for “dynamic equivalents”:³⁵ *finger* – *łapa* [paw], *unseeing* – *krótkowzroczny* [myopic], *middle* – *stateczny* [solid]. In his second version, the translator diverges from the original and uses dynamic equivalents available within the semantic field of the individual word. Not infrequently, he actually changes the original: *pine* – *pinia* [stone pine], *naive art* – *bohomaży* [daub].

As far as retaining foreignness in translation is concerned – as in the previous version – only the Russian lexeme “Traktirs” (C, 52) is Polonised (*zajazd* [inn]; T, 22), while the words in Spanish are provided with explanatory footnotes (T, 38, 48, 50).

³³ L. Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility*, ed. cit., pp. 2-3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ E. Nida's term: “A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression and [...] tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the concept of his own culture” (E. Nida. *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: Brill, 1964, p. 159).

THE POLEMIC OVER TARNAWSKI'S TRANSLATION (1964)

I would now like to take a look at the debate which followed the publication of Tarnawski's translation of *The Sisters*. The commentaries on Tarnawski's translation will be treated as various "testimonies of reading"³⁶ because it is the reader who understands or "executes"³⁷ the text. Barthes asserts that only by means of the act of reading

is revealed the total existence of writing; a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader [...]. The reader is the space in which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.³⁸

The translator is first and foremost a reader³⁹ and the translation a process of reading and interpreting⁴⁰ – a very careful and close one whose record is given to others. From the discussion above, we already know how the work was read by Tarnawski: for him, the convention of Polish Romanticism was crucial. It was within this frame that he located his translation.

A similar "testimony of reading" has been given by the eminent Polish critic Kazimierz Wyka (1910-1975), who follows Tarnawski's assumptions: "The translator, who claimed that while working on the translation he had the impression that he was 'translating back' into Polish a text which had needlessly been translated into English, was absolutely right".⁴¹ Wyka places *The Sisters* within the realm of the Polish Romantic tradition and argues that Conrad's artistic methods can be properly analysed only with reference to Polish literary tradition.⁴² The critic highlights textual allusions to the works of Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki as well as direct and indirect allusions to Polish Romantic poetics (i.e. their verbal and stylistic tropes). In my opinion, however, the most insightful observations by Wyka are those concerning Conrad's descriptive techniques. We may pass over superficial similar-

³⁶ Unlike other Polish scholars who have analysed the polemic between Wyka and Najder, we shall not argue who was right, as each of them, I believe, read *The Sisters* differently. (The debate has been discussed by W. Chwalewik: "Siostry Conrada" [In:] *Idem. Z literatury angielskiej*. Warszawa: PIW, 1968, pp. 281-286, and also by A. Bojanowicz and M. Zuber-Pogłódkowa: A. Bojanowicz and M. Zuber-Pogłódkowa. "Polska polemika nad *Siostrami* J. Conrada" [In:] *Studia Conradowskie*. Ed. S. Zabierowski. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1976, pp. 207-215.

³⁷ R. Barthes. "From Work to Text" [In:] *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Transl. S. Heath. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, p. 1475.

³⁸ *Idem*. "Death of an Author" [In:] *The Norton Anthology...*, ed. cit., p. 1469.

³⁹ G.Ch. Spivak has declared that in her opinion translation is "the most intimate act of reading" (G.Ch. Spivak. "The Politics of Translation" [In:] *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. L. Venuti. London–New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 193.

⁴⁰ U. Eco. *Experiences in Translation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001, p. 14.

⁴¹ K. Wyka. "Wyspa na polskiej zatoce" [An Island in the Polish Gulf] [In:] J. Conrad. *Siostry*. Warszawa: PIW, 1967, p. 59 [my translation].

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

ities concerning style and the choice of vocabulary, as Wyka bases his assessment only on the translated version (and not the original) – a methodological weakness of which he is aware.⁴³ However, Wyka's remarks concerning Conrad's artistic methods hold true because they refer to the "deep structure" of the text and are also broader in scope, as they refer not only to *The Sisters* but also to "Prince Roman", *Some Reminiscences* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (the last two works were not translated by Tarnawski and so he could not have influenced their style). Wyka identifies three analogies with Polish Romantic poetics that would seem to be of particular significance: the technique of describing a "landscape in motion" and the use of anthropomorphic and theriomorphic devices. Wyka's essay was reprinted several times, which indicates that he did not rescind his arguments even after a heated polemic had been written by Zdzisław Najder.

Our final "testimony of reading" will be Najder's response to Wyka. The assumptions on which Najder bases his reading of *The Sisters* differ from those of Wyka in that he dismisses all talk of the novel being autobiographical or based on Polish Romantic literature. The key counter-argument which Najder advances is that Wyka analyses a translation and not the English original:

This translation, the pet project of the Conrad enthusiast Wit Tarnawski, is clearly better than the original; it is better because of its firmer style and more precise use of language – but it is also better in other respects. In smoothing the style and enlivening the tone the translator supplants those suggested by the original with different literary and intellectual associations. For example, by simplifying Conrad's sentence about life in the West [...], Tarnawski tones down the blatant abstraction of the novel's style.⁴⁴ By giving the translated text a particular temper, which brings to mind Stefan Żeromski, Tarnawski raises the fragments with reflections about life from a level of empty wittiness to one of rhetorical sublimity and a concern with the deeper meaning of human existence. In any event, it should be noted that in Polish, which is saturated with the Romantic tradition [...], grandiloquent sentences seem sensible even when they actually make little sense.⁴⁵

According to Najder, Conrad's artistic technique derives from Flaubert, who in *L'Éducation sentimentale* offers "an excellent description of a 'moving' landscape as seen from the deck of a ship on the Seine."⁴⁶ In his opinion, the other aspects of Polish literary tradition which Wyka enumerates – i.e. anthropomorphism and theriomorphism – are part of our common European heritage and can be found in the Bible, Homer, Shelley, Blake, Sterne and Dickens.⁴⁷ However, I think that this latter argu-

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁴ Najder quotes the following sentence: "The Western life captivated him by the amplitude of its complicated surface, horrified him by the interior jumble of its *variegated* littleness" (C 46; emphasis added), which Tarnawski allegedly simplified: "Życie na Zachodzie ciągnęło Stefana bogactwem swej różnolitej powierzchni, a równocześnie przerażało wewnętrznym bezładem i _____ małością" (T 13; emphasis added). However, this simplification is negligible: Tarnawski omitted only one word: "complicated", putting "variegated" in its place.

⁴⁵ Z. Najder. "The Sisters: a grandiose failure" [In:] *Idem. Conrad in Perspective*. Transl. H. Carroll-Najder, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

ment is not entirely convincing, as the claim that these literary devices are abundantly present in European literature in no way invalidates Wyka's hypothesis that Conrad could have taken them directly from the Polish Romantics.

To conclude, we may say that the interpretations of *The Sisters* discussed above constitute Tarnawski's, Wyka's and Najder's "testimonies of reading". As readers, they each bring with them their own "baggage" of literary experience. Such a reading-writing (*lecture-réécriture*)⁴⁸ is a testimony to readers' activity proceeding in divergent directions. The final meaning of the work emerges from 'cooperation' between the text and the reader (in this case the translator, Wit Tarnawski, the literary critic Kazimierz Wyka and Conrad's biographer Zdzisław Najder). Tarnawski was a careful reader of Conrad. He undertook his translation with clearly defined assumptions and made choices which shaped the Polish version according to the rules of Polish Romantic poetics. In a word, Tarnawski's translation of *The Sisters* is a culture-bound testimony of a reader's reception in Poland.

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